

Aspect in English and Mugali Rai: A Contrastive Study

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Abstract

The paper attempts to explore the aspect system in Mugali Rai, spoken in Dhankuta district of Nepal by a very few people firstly and compares and contrasts Mugali Rai aspect system with that of English aspect system secondly. There are only two aspects in Mugali Rai, namely perfect and progressive. Perfect aspect can be categorised into past perfect and present perfect in terms of time dimensions. Similarly, progressive aspect is also categorised into past progressive and present progressive from time dimensions. All types of aspects in Mugali Rai are morphologically marked. On the contrary, aspect system in English is not only morphologically marked. There are several complex constructions using have+past participle, be+present participle and have+been+present participle for perfect, progressive and perfect progressive respectively. Mugali Rai has only four structures for aspect whereas English has 17 different types of aspectual structures described in examples 24 to 40. They are really challenging jobs for Mugali Rai learners to conceptualise these different structures. Finally, this paper finds out EFL problems and suggests some pedagogical strategies while teaching and learning English aspect system as a foreign language to Mugali Rai learners.

Keywords: aspect, past progressive, present progressive, past perfect, present perfect

1. Introduction

Aspect is certainly different from tense though they are interrelated to each other. There are mainly two types of aspect, namely grammatical aspect and lexical aspect. In grammatical aspect, aspect is manifested through grammatical operations whereas lexical aspect refers to semantic properties of verbs whether or not an action is characterized by duration, an end point, or change (Cowan, 2009, p. 352). In this paper, grammatical aspect is described. Aspect expresses how the speaker views the action of the verb. If an action that is seen as bounded and complete is perfect in aspect. If the action is seen as incomplete, it is imperfect in aspect; if seen as repeated, it is iterative, if seen as occurring regularly, it is habitual (Cowan, 2009, p. 251). In another definition, aspect describes the temporal shape of events or states (Payne, 2003, p. 238). Aspect is categorised into two types, namely grammatical and lexical aspect. In grammatical aspect, aspect is manifested through grammatical operations whereas lexical aspect refers to semantic properties of verbs whether or not an action is characterized by duration, an end point, or change (Cowan, 2009, p. 352). Similarly, aspect is defined through three dimensions, viz perfectivity which is categorized into two binary concepts such as perfective vs. imperfective, sequentiality which is categorized into perfective vs. perfect and immediacy which is categorized into remote vs. vivid (Givón, 2001, p. 287).

1.1 Research Questions

There are a number of research issues about aspect in English and Mugali. This study mainly focuses on the following research questions.

- a) Is there perfective or perfect aspect in English and Mugali?
- b) How is aspect constructed in English and Mugali?
- c) What are the similarities and differences between English and Mugali aspect?
- d) What are the pedagogical implications.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

There are several objectives of the study. This study has the following objectives.

- a) to analyze the aspectual construction in English and Mugali.
- b) to contrast between English and Mugali Rai aspect
- c) to point out pedagogical implications.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is limited to contrastive study between English and Mugali aspect. This study mainly analyses aspect system in both languages. It focuses on analysing Mugali aspect to compare and contrast it with English. It would be significant for those who wish to study endangered languages of Nepal and to compare and contrast between two languages from pedagogical perspective. It would also be significant for those who have been teaching English as a foreign language across the world.

1.4 Methods of the Study

This study is based on descriptive linguistic approach, basically based on Contrastive Analysis (Lado, 1957; James, 1980). Contrastive analysis between two languages is based on some previous works (Rai, 2007, 2012). In the case of sources of data, English data were taken from secondary sources, exactly from Givon (2001), Payne (2003) and Cowan (2009). On the contrary, Mugali Rai is undocumented and undescribed language. For the first time, I visited the field (Muga VDC of Dhankuta, east Nepal) and described it in my first field work (Rai 2011).

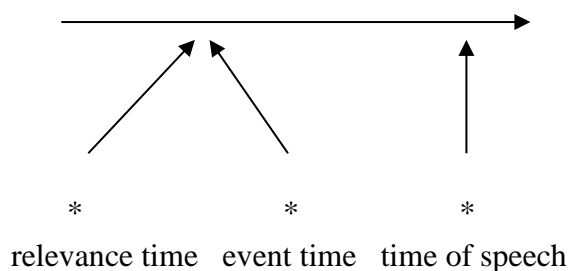
2. Analysis of English and Mugali Aspect

In this study, aspect in English and Mugali is described. There are different types of aspects expressed through the inflections in the verb such as perfect and perfective aspect which expresses the completeness of an action, imperfect aspect and progressive which expresses an ongoing activity or process, iterative aspect which expresses repeated of an action, inceptive aspect which signals the beginning of an action, habitual aspect which expresses the action occurring regularly, inchoative aspect which signals entrance into a state, and lexical aspect.

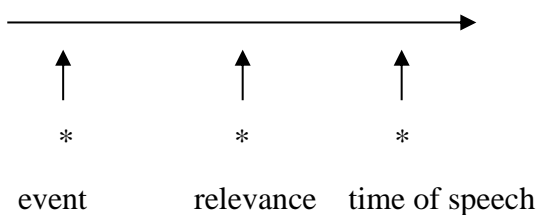
2.1 English Aspect

In English, they are represented by a number of ways. There are some puzzling concepts in different types of aspects. So, it is needed to define some concepts of aspect found in the English language. In many traditional grammar books of English, perfect and perfective are treated as one and the same. So is not the case. here are considerably differences between perfect and perfective aspect. The difference between perfective and perfect aspect can be presented by following figure adapted from Givon (2001, p. 296). This following figure can make distinction between perfective and perfect aspect more clearly.

a. Perfective Past



b. Perfect Past



Perfective refers to a situation which is seen as a whole, regardless of the time contrasts which may be a part of it. On the contrary, perfect refers to a past situation where the event is seen as having some present relevance (Crystal, 2008, p. 356). Givon (2001, p. 296) has given the following examples to make the difference between Past perfective and Past perfect.

1. He came in and ate rice (past perfective).
2. He came in. He had (already) eaten rice (past perfect).

The difference between perfective and perfect may also be defined as the in-sequence and out-of-sequence. In the example No. 1, there is in-sequence between two clauses which expresses the perfective aspect and in example No. 2, there is out-of-sequence between two clauses which expresses the perfect aspect. If we look at these two examples mentioned in example No 1 and 2, there is no perfective aspect in English. In English, the aspectual meaning of perfective aspect is expressed by past tense. So, there is only perfect aspect but not perfective aspect in English.

In English, there are only two aspects, viz. perfect aspect and progressive aspect which are represented in the verbs. Two aspects are expressed through auxiliary verbs and the form of main verbs. The progressive aspect which represents ongoing action is structured with *be+present participle (-ing)* and the perfect aspect which represents action that is complete is constructed with *have+past participle (-ed/-en)*. These two forms of aspect express the aspectual meanings in English. Progressive and perfect aspects are combined to form perfect progressive aspect in English. All of these aspects are combined with the three dimensions of time viz. past, present and future. They can be illustrated by the following examples.

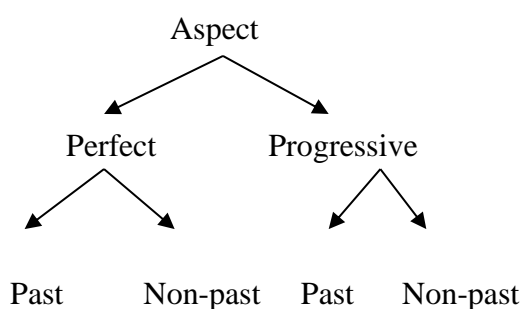
3. He is working (progressive aspect expressing present time).
4. He was working (progressive aspect expressing past time).
5. He will be working (progressive aspect expressing future time).
6. He has worked/ he has broken a cup (perfect aspect expressing present time).
7. He had worked/ he had broken a cup (perfect aspect expressing past time).
8. He will have worked/ he will have broken a cup (perfect aspect expressing future time).
9. He has been working (perfect progressive aspect expressing present time).
10. He had been working (perfect progressive aspect expressing past time).
11. He will have been working (perfect progressive aspect expressing future time).

In English, there are nine sub-types of aspect which play an important role in English grammar and sometimes more problematic for EFL students.

2.2 Mugali Rai Aspect

Mugali Rai [lmh] is one of the Kirati languages spoken in small village of Dhankuta District, east Nepal. It is SOV language with postposition, no gender, verbal affixation markers for person, number, tense and aspect (Epele, 2012, p. 60) but it has not been recorded by the latest census report (2011). So, it is on the verge of extinction.

In Mugali Rai, there are two types of aspect. They are perfect and progressive aspect. Both of them can be categorized into two sub-types on the basis of time dimensions viz. past and present only. There is no grammatical marker referring to future in Mugali Rai. They are described below (Rai, 2012, p. 61-69, 2015, p. 92-95).



<-yuṅsu -te> <-yuṅsu> <-yakt> <-yau?>

2.2.1 Perfect Aspect

Perfect aspect can be categorized into two types on the basis of time dimension which are past perfect and present perfect.

2.2.1.1 Past Perfect

In Mugali Rai, past perfect is constructed through complex structure. For past perfect, the present perfect marker <-yuṅsu> and past marker <-ye/yē> and another marker <-te> are suffixed to the verb stem gradually. It can be shown in the following examples.

12. *kaṇa cama thukyūṅsuyēte*
 ka-ṇa cama thuk-yuṅsu-yē-te
 1SGA/S-ERG rice cook-PERF-PST-PERF
 I had cooked rice
13. *ka imyuṅsuyēte*
 ka im-yuṅsu-yēte
 1SGA/S sleep-PERF-PST-PERF
 I had slept.

2.2.1.2 Present Perfect

Similarly, present perfect aspect is expressed by <-yuṅsu> morpheme which is suffixed to the verb stem. The morpheme <-yuṅsu> is followed by the past tense marker <-yē> immediately. It can be illustrated by the following examples.

14. *kaṇa cama thukyūṅsuyē*
 ka-ṇa cama thuk-yuṅsu-yē
 1SGA/S-ERG rice cook-PERF-PST
 I have cooked rice.
15. *ka imyuṅsuyē*
 ka im-yuṅsu-yē
 1SGA/S sleep-PERF-PST
 I have slept.

2.2.2 Progressive Aspect

Progressive aspect refers to an ongoing action of verb in Mugali Rai which can be categorized into two types on the basis of time dimension. They are past progressive and present progressive aspect. They are described below.

2.2.2.1 Past Progressive Aspect

In Mugali Rai, the morpheme < -yakt> refers to past progressive aspect which attaches to the verb stem immediately and it is followed by tense and other markers. It is illustrated with the following examples.

16. *ka cama thukyaktayẽ*
 ka cama thuk-yakt-yẽ
 1SGA/S rice cook-PROG-PST
 I was cooking rice.

17. *ka imyaktaye)*
 ka im-yakt-ye)
 1SGA/S sleep-PROG-PST
 I was sleeping.

2.2.2.2 Present Progressive Aspect

In Mugali Rai, the suffix <-yau?> which immediately follows a verb represents the present progressive aspect. The following examples make them clear.

18. *ka cama thukyau?ŋa*
 ka cama thuk-yau?-ŋa
 1SGA/S rice cook-PROG-1SNPST
 I am cooking rice
19. *ka imyau?ŋa*
 ka im-yau?-ŋa
 1SGGA/S sleep-PROG-1SGNPST
 I am sleeping.

3. A Contrastive Analysis and Acquisitional Problems

English and Mugali Rai are completely different languages. English as SVO language is a member of Germanic group of Proto-Indo-European language family (Yule, 1993, p. 168) whereas Mugali Rai as SOV language is a member of Eastern Kiranti of Tibeto Burman language family (Winter, 1991, p. 110). These two language are completely different to each other from language family perspective. So, the construction of the aspect in both languages are different. If there are certainly differences between them, there would be some acquisitional problems that Mugali Rai as EFL learners face. The major contrasts in constructing aspect between two language are as follows:

In the Mugali Rai language, many things such as tense, aspect, person, number, agent, patient markers are inflected in a single verb. It is basic feature of the Tibeto-Burman languages. Such features are found in the pronominalized language. It is also known as polysynthetic language (Crystal, 2008, p. 374). The example 20 shows the construction of past perfect in Mugali. The example 21 shows the construction of present perfect in Mugali. The example 22 shows the construction of past progressive in Mugali. The example 23 shows the construction of present progressive in Mugali. There is no future aspect in Mugali Rai like in English. Similarly, there is no construction of perfect progressive combination in Mugali Rai which is found in English. The following examples make them clear.

20. *kaŋa cama thukyunsuyēte*
 ka-ŋa cama thuk-yuŋsu-yē-te
 1SGA/S-ERG rice cook-PERF-PST-PERF
 I had cooked rice.
21. *kaŋa cama thukyunsuyē*
 ka-ŋa cama thuk-yuŋsu-yē
 1SGA/S-ERG rice cook-PERF-PST
 I have cooked rice.
22. *ka cama thukyaktayē*
 ka cama thuk-yakt-yē
 1SGA/S rice cook-PROG-PST
 I was cooking rice.
23. *ka cama thukyau?ŋa*
 ka cama thuk-yau?-ŋa
 1SGA/S rice cook-PROG-1SNPST
 I am cooking rice.

In Mugali Rai, markers for all types of aspect follow a stem. The stem *thuk-* is followed by morphemes <-yuŋsu-PST-*te*> for past perfect, by <-yuŋsu> for present perfect, by <-yakt> for past progressive and by <-yau?> for present progressive. In this way, there are only two aspect in Mugali Rai, namely perfect and progressive. Both perfect and progressive can be categorised into present and past in terms of time dimension. All these aspects in Mugali Rai are morphologically marked.

On the contrary, aspect is not only morphologically marked in English. There are complex constructions for aspect in English. There are three types of aspect, namely perfect, progressive and perfect progressive aspect. In English, aspect is constructed through the combination of the auxiliary verb and the forms of the main verb. The structure of aspect is more complex in comparison to the structure of Mugali Rai aspect. In English, perfect aspect is constructed through '*have+past participle*'. But there three types of perfect in terms of time

dimensions. They are past perfect, present perfect and future perfect. Past perfect is constructed through '*had+past participle*', present perfect is constructed through '*have/has+past participle*' and future perfect is constructed through '*shall/will have+past participle*'. Similarly, progressive is constructed through '*be+present participle*'. Progressive aspect is also categorized into three types in terms of time dimensions. They are past progressive, present progressive and future progressive. Past progressive is constructed through '*was/were+present participle*'. Present progressive is constructed through '*am/is/are+present participle*'. Future progressive is constructed through '*shall/will be+present participle*'. The example 24 refers to past perfect, the examples 25-26 refer to present perfect and the examples 27-28 refer to future perfect. Similarly, the examples 29-30 refer to past progressive, the examples 31-33 refer to present progressive and the examples 34-35 refer to future progressive. Similarly, the example 36 refers to past perfect progressive, the examples 37-38 refer to present perfect progressive and examples 39-40 refer to future perfect progressive. The following examples make it clear.

24. I/we/you/he/she/(it)/they had cooked rice.
25. I/we/you/they have cooked rice.
26. He/she/(it) has cooked rice.
27. I/we shall have cooked rice.
28. You/he/she/(it)/they will have cooked rice.
29. I/he/she/(it) was cooking rice.
30. We/you/they were cooking rice.
31. I am cooking rice.
32. We/you/they are cooking rice.
33. He/she/(it) is cooking rice.
34. I/we shall be cooking rice.
35. You/he/she/(it)/they will be cooking rice.
36. I/we/you/he/she/(it)/they had been cooking rice.
37. I/we/you/they have been cooking rice.
38. He/she/(it) has been cooking rice.
39. I/we shall have been cooking rice.
40. You/he/she/(it) will have been cooking rice.

In this way, English aspect is more complicated in comparison to aspect in Mugali Rai. The example 24 is not so problematic for Mugali Rai because its equivalent is found in Mugali Rai. It is assumed that structural differences are the source of difficulty in foreign language learning. Lado (1957) viewed learning difficulty and differences as being directly and proportionally related. Of the L2 learner he wrote: "Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him and those elements that are different will be difficult" (as cited in James, 1980, p. 188). So structural differences between two languages play an important role in learning a foreign language. Structural differences can be found in many examples in English which are not found in Mugali Rai. For examples, the sentences found in examples 25-26 are problematic since there are two auxiliary verbs 'have' and 'has' which are selected on the basis

of subject. Both sentences are realized by a single sentence in Mugali Rai. So, Mugali Rai as EFL learners confuse in selecting the auxiliary verbs 'has' and 'have' appropriately.

Similarly, the sentences found in examples 27-28 are not found in the Mugali Rai. There is no separate structural form to express future perfect in Mugali Rai. So, there is acquisitional problem for Mugali Rai as EFL learners.

The sentences found in examples 29-30 are also problematic for Mugali Rai as EFL learners. They cannot use the 'was' and 'were' appropriately. The sentences found in examples 31-33 are also problematic in the sense that Mugali Rai as EFL learners cannot use /am/is/are/ appropriately.

There is no future progressive in Mugali Rai. So, sentences found in examples 34-35 are also problematic for them. Mugali Rai learners cannot use 'shall' and 'will' appropriately.

The sentences found in examples 36-40 are also problematic because there is no combination of both perfect and progressive aspect in the Mugali Rai language.

In conclusion, there are only 4 structures to express aspect in Mugali Rai. They are past perfect, present perfect, past progressive and present progressive. On the contrary, English has 17 different structures to express aspect. They have been described in examples from 24 to 40. There are considerable structural differences between English and Mugali Rai aspect.

4. Conclusion

There are considerable differences between English and Mugali Rai aspect. So, it is assumed that Mugali Rai learners find English aspect difficult to use appropriately. Then, they can commit errors in the use of English aspect. So, language teacher should pay much attention to those areas where there are structural differences between two languages.

For addressing grammatical errors, Cowan (2009, p. 45-46) explained extensively. The question is that what should we do about the grammatical errors students make? To answer the question, we must look at the development of interlanguage. Interlanguage (IL) refers to the language system that evolves as a learner studies an L2. At any given point in the development of a learner's IL, some aspects of the IL grammar may be identical to L2 grammar, but other aspects will be different. The eventual result of instruction and years of practice speaking an L2 will produce an IL we can call the *end-state grammar*. This is the grammar that the learners will use for communicating with native speakers of the L2 from that point on. It will not change much and it probably will not be identical to the grammar of a native speaker, but it may be very close to it. Thus according to this model the process of learning English is a process by which a learner begins to develop an IL and that IL continues to grow more and more similar to the English grammar of a native speaker until it stabilizes.

Speaker A: L1.....IL1.....L2 (English)

Speaker B: L2.....IL2.....L2 (English)

Speaker C: L3.....IL3...L2 (English)

This diagramme illustrates the fact that ILs of different learners vary in their approximation to the grammar of the L2 that is being learned.

Some common errors made by Mugali Rai as EFL learners which were taken during my field work in 2011 are as follows:

41. *It is/was looking good.
42. *I am/was hopping.
43. *I am/was understanding.
44. *I am/was resembling.
45. *I lived here since 2000.
46. *He have eaten rice.
47. *You was writing a letter.

Students' proficiency in English aspect can be developed in English through some activities can be adopted. Mugali Rai as EFL learners cannot make distinction between activity verb and stative verb. Stative verbs cannot express progressive aspect. For present progressive, students are asked to describe the present situation of weather like *it's raining*, *the temperature is increasing* etc. For the correct use of the auxiliary verb in present progressive, students can be categorized into two groups 'A' and 'B'. Under group 'A', students should be categorized into 'I, we, you, he, she, it and they' groups. On the other hand, under 'B' group, students should be categorized into 'am', 'is' and 'are' groups. 'I' subgroup from group 'A' matches 'am' sub-group of group 'B'. In this case, when students from 'A' group say 'I', students from group 'B' say 'am'. Similarly, 'we', 'you', 'they' sub-groups of group 'A' matches 'are' subgroup of 'B'. When students from group 'A' say 'we', 'you' and 'they', students from group 'B' say 'are'. Similarly, 'he', 'she', 'it' sub-groups of group 'A' matches the 'is' sub-group of 'B'. When students from group 'A' say 'he', 'she', 'it', students from group B say 'is'. Then, they should be asked to drill until they remember these rules perfectly.

Similarly, the students are asked to perform interview such as where was your father working? What were you doing when the bomb exploded? This type of interview helps to use past progressive.

Similarly, students are asked to make distinction between sentences like *I have lived here since 2005*. vs. **I lived here since 2005*. Why is the former sentence correct and not the latter one? In this way, students can be engaged in different activities such as dialogue, interview, role play, demonstration, etc. addressing the English aspects system.

Abbreviations

1 = first

PERF = perfect

A = agent	PROG = progressive
ERG = ergative	PST = past
NPST = non-past	S= subject
SG = singular	P = patient

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